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## Virginia Commonwealth University

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Megan A. Persinger entitled PSYCHO BEACH PARTY: A VOCAL AND PHYSICAL EXPLORATION OF GENDER has been approved by his or her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis or dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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May 5, 2010

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PSYCHO BEACH PARTY: A EXPLORATION OF GENDER

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Bachelor of General Sciences, University of Kansas, 2007

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## Acknowledgement

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Janet, thank you for teaching me that I *can* do everything—just not all at the same time. You inspire and change the world around you, and if Life had not brought me to VCU and your program, I would not be the teacher, or person, that I am today.

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Lorri, it’s always been a joy to work with you, whether as a teaching assistant or vocal coach. You’re a wonderful person—full of talent and grace. Thank you for your positive energy and constant support.

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## Abstract

### PSYCHO BEACH PARTY: A VOCAL AND PHYSICAL EXPLORATION OF GENDER

By Megan A. Persinger, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Major Director: Janet B. Rodgers  
Professor of Theatre, Voice

On September 24, 2009, Theatre VCU opened its production of *Psycho Beach Party*, written by Charles Busch and directed by Steve Perigard. In our production, two male actors, Tommy Callan and Kyle Cornell, were cross-sex cast to play female characters, Chicklet and Marvel Ann respectively. In addition to serving as vocal coach for the production, I was to help Callan and Cornell vocally transform into female characters. I have documented our exploration of gender, specifically the vocal transformation from male to female, in Theatre VCU's production of *Psycho Beach Party*.

Neither actor had played a female character onstage before, and Kyle Cornell had only just begun his vocal training at VCU. Both actors successfully embraced feminine vocal and physical characteristics to the point where many audience members believed them to be female actors. This document was created in Microsoft Word 2007.

## Introduction

When *Psycho Beach Party* opened in 1987, Charles Busch, a thirty-three year old actor and playwright, stepped onto the stage—as a sixteen year old girl with multiple personalities! *Psycho Beach Party* was originally titled *Gidget Goes Psychotic* ; a tribute to Busch’s inspiration for his script. The title was later changed due to copyright concerns. In this satirical marriage of surfer movies and slasher films, Busch’s characters confront questions of love, sexuality, and gender.

On September 24, 2009, Theatre VCU opened its production of *Psycho Beach Party*, written by Charles Busch and directed by Steve Perigard. In our production, two male actors, Tommy Callan and Kyle Cornell, were cross-sex cast to play female characters, Chicklet and Marvel Ann respectively. In addition to serving as vocal coach for the production, I was to help Callan and Cornell vocally transform into female characters. I worked alongside Alexis Goldstein, assistant director and movement coach/choreographer, to help Callan and Cornell develop their female characteristics. I have documented our exploration of gender, specifically the vocal transformation from male to female, in Theatre VCU’s production of *Psycho Beach Party*.

*Psycho Beach Party* takes a satirical look into human emotions, relationships, sexuality, and gender. Taking inspiration from movies like *Gidget* (1959, directed by Paul Wendkos), Busch’s story is set in Malibu Beach in the early 1960s. It centers around

Chicklet, a would-be surfer girl suffering from multiple personality disorder. While Chicklet learns to surf, meets a movie star, experiences her first crush, deals with a man-obsessed friend, and tries to save her friendship with the nerdy Berdine, her alter ego, Ann Bowman, plots world domination—starting with Malibu Beach!

Throughout the action of the play, we see four additional personalities manifest themselves through Chicklet. The most prominent of these is Ann Bowman, a woman who will do anything to achieve her goal of becoming Dominatrix Empress of the World. In addition to Ann, there is Tylene, a fast-talking, sassy cashier, who lives inside Chicklet. We also see Dr. Rose Mayer, an on-air psychologist, and Steve, a male model. While we only see glimpses of Tylene, Dr. Rose Mayer, and Steve, they all help Chicklet deal with difficult, and sometimes intimate, situations.

Chicklet lives with her mother, Mrs. Forest (played by Caylyn Temple). Mrs. Forest wears the mask of the perfect 1950's mother—the ultimate homemaker. However, whenever she encounters anything that threatens to upset her perfect mask, she reacts in a way that is reminiscent of Joan Crawford, as played by Faye Dunaway, in *Mommie Dearest*, at one point going so far as to tie Chicklet up and lock her in her bedroom! Her ferocious defense of the perfect family unit exists in order to hide a number of dirty little secrets from her past, which include prostitution and the accidental death of Chicklet's twin brother Frankie.

Part of Chicklet's struggle is to keep the peace with two very different groups of friends. The first group is her girlfriends, the boy-crazy Marvel Ann and Chicklet's brainiac best friend, Berdine. Life becomes more difficult when Chicklet is accepted by a

group of surfers, run by the Great Kanaka. His right-hand man is the dreamy Star Cat.

The group also includes the ambitious Provoloney and the blossoming chef Yo-yo. These characters all face personal struggles involving love, sexuality, and gender. Kanaka enjoys his position as alpha male, but discovers that he loves to be dominated by Chicklet's alter ego, Ann Bowman. Star Cat tries to bury his affluent past and his dreams of becoming a psychiatrist under the mask of a too-cool-for-school surfer bum. Provoloney and Yo-yo slowly come to terms with their homosexuality and love for one another.

In my documentation of our work, I am focusing primarily on Callan and Cornell and their development of Chicklet (with her four additional personalities) and Marvel Ann. I also place a secondary focus on Mrs. Forest (played by Caylyn Temple), Star Cat (played by Matt Mitchell), and Kanaka (played by Nick Aliff). Mrs. Forest is traditionally a drag role, therefore Perigard, Temple, Goldstein, and I worked carefully to help Temple develop the character fully, but to avoid playing her in way that appeared overdone when played by a female. Mitchell, as Star Cat, had a number of intimate scenes with both Callan and Cornell, so he was a part of our character explorations from the start. We wanted Callan and Cornell's feminine characteristics to develop simultaneously with their relationship to Mitchell. Many of their mannerisms, both vocally and physically, developed in reaction to his work. Because of Kanaka's relationship with Ann Bowman, a lot of Callan's character development happened in relation to Aliff's work.

I will take a moment to clarify the terms I will use. I use the word "sex" to refer to the biological differences between men and women. "Gender" is used to refer to the social roles and behaviors we have learned to accept as masculine and feminine. In addition,

when I use the name of the actor, I am referring to his or her work. When I use the name of the character, I am referring to the given circumstances of the character and script.

## **Pre-show Work**

### **VASTA Conference 2009**

Before beginning work on *Psycho Beach Party*, I attended the Voice and Speech Trainers Association's (VASTA) annual conference in New York City. Fortuitously, the first panel I attended was *Sharing the Wealth: Speech Language Pathologists and Actor-Voice Trainers Serving the Transgendered Client.*” Daydrie Hague, Richard Adler, Douglas MacArthur, and Joanna Cazden shared their methods of overcoming the difficulties faced by males who are transitioning to female, socially and/or biologically. One of the points they stressed was that achieving a “feminine” voice requires more than simply raising pitch. In some cases, a high pitched voice doesn't match the client's body type and can seem unnatural to the listener. They discussed the importance of vocal patterns, pitch usage, and body language that society accepts as “feminine.”

In exploring the physiological differences between male and female voices, I found a number of interesting factors that influence voice production. Male vocal folds generally range in length from 17 to 25 millimeters, while female vocal folds usually range from 12.5 to 17.5 millimeters. Male vocal folds are also generally thicker than female vocal folds.

Figure 1: Male Vocal Folds

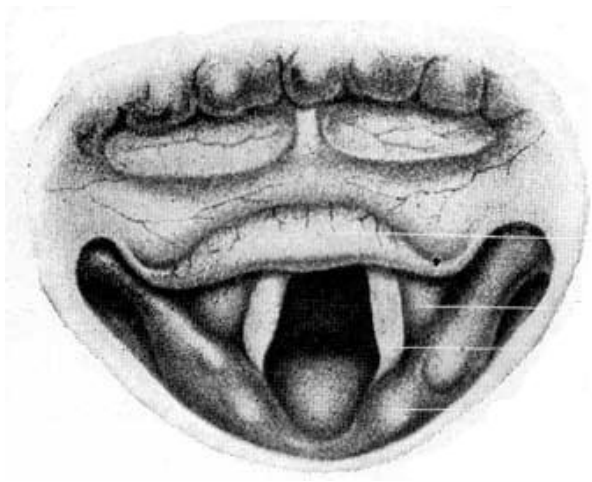
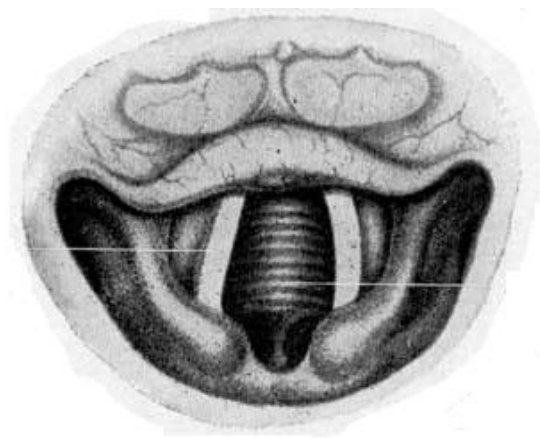


Figure 2: Female Vocal Folds



\*Length measured vertically in these pictures. The male vocal folds appear shorter as they are partially covered by the epiglottis.

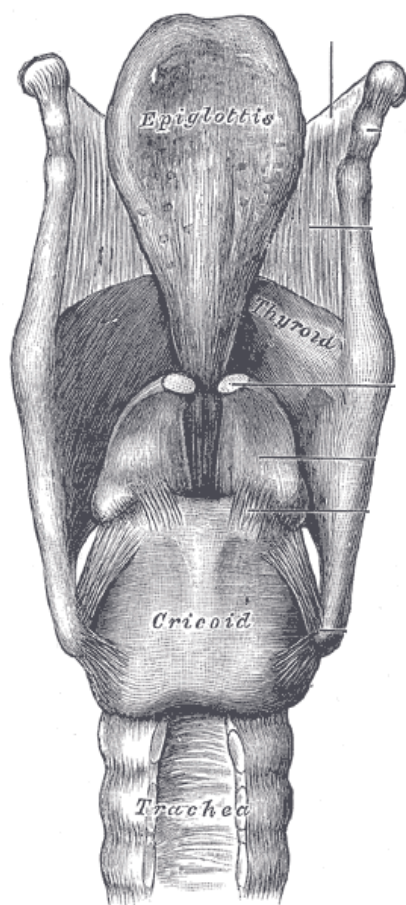
Unlike the vocal folds, differences in the larynx are not necessarily linked to sex. Larynx size correlates to body size regardless of sex. This supports the assertion from *Sharing the Wealth*—that relative pitch alone is not indicative of sex and gender. One



well-known example is Rick Astley and his hit *Never Gonna Give You Up*. Reporters repeatedly expressed surprise at the incongruity between his small frame and large, booming voice. This example highlights the expectations we have concerning voice and body size.

While there is no distinct relationship between sex and larynx size, men tend to have larger larynxes, which allow them to achieve a lower *basal fundamental frequency*—the lowest note a person can produce. It is interesting to note that a low basal fundamental frequency does not guarantee that a speaker will habitually speak on a lower pitch.

Figure 3: The Larynx



Just as differences in size will change the sound of an instrument, each person's voice is subject to the shape and size of his or her larynx. However, this is only one of many factors that also include: sex, hormones, habits stemming from societal, peer, and familial influences, and the physical health of the vocal instrument. Anne Karpf, in her book *The Human Voice*, gives numerous examples of vocal changes that are socially influenced. One example is a study which showed that during the first six months of life, babies of both sexes demonstrated an increased vocal range from 85 Hz to 97 Hz. However, by their first birthday, the girls showed a range that increased up 110 Hz, while the boys' range decreased to 80 Hz. By adulthood, the male vocal pitch averages around 120 Hz, while the female average is 225 Hz (Karpf 154-5).

These physiological factors prompted me to focus on helping Callan and Cornell find voices that fit the character along with each actor's physical stature. This also supported the need to focus on vocal characteristics beyond simple baseline pitch. The actors would need vocal characteristics to support their own feminine side, such as pitch usage and range, tone, placement of resonance, quality of voice. As I later discovered, these changes heavily influenced, and were heavily influenced by, the physical mannerisms of each character as well.

Daydrie Hague, a theatre voice coach working in conjunction with a speech-language pathologist, brought a particularly useful insight to the VASTA panel. She described the need to find the harmony of the "inner and outer...owning the voice in a very physical and kinesthetic way." This idea of harmony and ownership helped the actors to find each character's voice in a natural, organic way—a voice that truly belonged to the

character instead of a stereotyped voice layered on top of their character work. Alexis Goldstein, the assistant director and movement coach, and I worked together with the actors to help them find that kinesthetic ownership of the voice. As I will discuss later, Callan in particular found separate physical centers for each personality's voice that aided his transitions between Chicklet's personalities.

Hague also discussed the idea of male-to-female clients using the imagery of their pre-pubescent self as way to access and develop feminine characteristics. Callan found this image useful because it applied directly to his main character, the under-developed Chicklet.

In addition to her contributions during the *Sharing the Wealth...* workshop, Hague co-authored an essay that appeared in the 2009 publication of the VASTA publication *The Moving Voice: Essays on Voice and Speech*. Her essay, co-authored with Michael Moran, proved to be an invaluable guide throughout the rehearsal process.

***The Moving Voice; Essays on Voice and Speech. "A New Role—A Team Approach to Supporting the Transgender/Transsexual Client in Transition." Daydrie Hague & Michael Moran CCC-SLP***

In their article, *A New Role—A Team Approach to Supporting the Transgender/Transsexual Client in Transition*, Daydrie Hague and Dr. Michael Moran document their work with a 56 year old male-to-female client. Their work provided a useful guide in coaching Callan and Cornell through the development of their female characters.

The adjustments on which Hague and Moran worked with their client included voice and body characteristics: vocal patterns, speech patterns, posture, stance, gestural habits, and social behaviors. This coincides with Hague's goal to find a kinesthetic ownership of one's voice. Together with Goldstein, we developed exercises and imagery that helped Callan and Cornell make adjustments to each of these areas.

In their article, Hague and Moran praise the book *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client* by Adler, Hirsch, and Mordaunt for its insight and guidance. Adler, Hirsch, and Mordaunt suggest certain physical characteristics to create a "feminine silhouette—curved fingers, fluidity of movement, creating "S" shapes, more facial mobility, nodding while listening, and curving the body inward to listen to others..." (Cook 140). In addition, Hague and Dr. Moran discuss working with their client to develop more hip movement while walking.

Working with Cornell to develop a female character would prove to be a careful balancing act. He was just beginning his first year of voice training at VCU when rehearsals began, so during the rehearsal period, I needed to teach him abdominal breathing, breath support, resonance, and other basic vocal skills as well as vocal characteristics and body language that the audience would read and accept as feminine. I decided that teaching Cornell some basic belly dance moves would support both goals. As I will discuss later, this proved to immensely helpful for Cornell, and eventually for Callan as well.

One interesting difference between our work and that of Hague and Moran was the focus on pitch. While Hague and Moran hoped to raise their client's baseline fundamental

frequency from 116 Hz to 150-185 Hz (the average for many females), I chose not to have Callan and Cornell focus on a baseline frequency. Our work with pitch consisted of pitch patterns and range. This would be especially important for Callan's multiple roles. Instead of trying to develop five different baseline frequencies on which to base five different voices, I thought it would be better for instantaneous personality switches if Callan had a prominent vocal characteristic for each character. This approach worked well, especially when combined with energy/breath centers for each character and other characteristics developed with the help of Goldstein.

There were several reasons I chose to differ from Hague and Dr. Moran on the question of baseline frequency. The first reason was the physical differences between Hague and Moran's client and the actors with whom I was working. They described their client as "tall and broadly built" (Cook 140). Callan and Cornell are both under five feet eight inches tall and Callan is slim and small-framed. His body type fit the underdeveloped Chicklet so well, and he played a female so naturally, that during a scene in which he takes his top off to change into his swimsuit, some audience members reacted as if a young female actor had taken her top off. Many said later that they did not realize at first that Callan was male.

Like Hague and Dr. Moran, I decided to work on developing Callan and Cornell's mask and head resonance to reduce the usage of their chest resonance. In their article, they also recommended focusing on finding a relaxed facial posture to focus on lips and the lower jaw. The focus on lips would prove to be especially useful for Cornell's "sex kitten" character, Marvel Ann.

Hague stressed the importance of using text in the development of a feminine voice. Her client had a hard time relating to the text that had previously been used in her vocal therapy, but she found a new musicality in her speech pattern when she connected with a piece of text from Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. I knew it would be important to use text from *Psycho Beach Party* as much as possible, especially in high emotion scenes. One scene in particular was especially useful in conjunction with Alba Emoting, which I will discuss in the next chapter. As Hague described it, it was a way of "exploring feminine speech characteristics in a non-mechanical way...an inside out transformation."

### **Conversations with the Director**

Steve Perigard, the director, wanted to develop the polarities of each character, a continuing theme in *Psycho Beach Party*. Obviously, Chicklet, with her split personalities, is the biggest example of duality. None of the other characters "split" in a way that matches her personality changes, but they each hold dualities that Perigard wanted to highlight physically and vocally. Star Cat shuns his life as an affluent psychiatry student, even going so far as to reject his birth name, Herbert Mullin. Kanaka is torn between his alpha male persona and his desire to be dominated. Bettina Barnes must hide her boisterous personality and adopt a sweet, demure, soft-spoken persona. Mrs. Forest is hiding her pain over the death of her son and her sundry past under the mask of the perfect homemaker. Steve wanted each of these dualities to be seen through physicality and vocal mannerisms of each character.

Perigard also wanted to use the *Gidget* movies for inspiration. For Chicklet, Star Cat, and Kanaka, Perigard wanted us to focus on the main characters in the *Gidget* movies.

The character Gidget was the obvious influence for Chicklet. The character Kahuna was the inspiration for Kanaka, and Moondoggie inspired Star Cat. Both Busch and Perigard used these movies as a creative influence for their work on *Psycho Beach Party*.

While Perigard had a clear idea of Chicklet's inspirations, he left Chicklet's personalities open to any number of possibilities. His main focus with the personalities was character work. He wanted each personality to have a clear history of who it was, why it existed, and what its purpose was. It was also important for each personality to be physically and vocally distinct.

For Mrs. Forest, he asked that we look to Joan Crawford for inspiration, especially as she appeared in her later movies. He particularly wanted to focus on using what he called the "old movie dialect." It includes clear, sharp diction and open, pure vowels.

For Bettina Barnes, Perigard envisioned a B movie queen who wanted to be Marilyn Monroe or Jayne Mansfield. Under the soft, innocent exterior, Barnes was more of a Mamie Van Doren; a powerful, outspoken woman.

### ***Gidget* (1959), directed by Paul Wendkos**

Perigard wanted to stay true to Charles Busch's original inspiration, Paul Wendkos' 1959 movie, *Gidget*. The character of Chicklet is obviously based on the title character of Wendkos' movie, played by Sandra Dee.

*Gidget* is the story of Frances Lawrence, a young girl living by the beach. During an unsuccessful "manhunt" with her friends, Frances gets caught in seaweed and is rescued by Moondoggie, a local surfer. After her ride back to shore on Moondoggie's surfboard, Francis becomes enamored with surfing. Eventually, Francis is accepted by the surfer

group, which is led by the Great Kahuna, a former Air Force pilot turned surfer bum. The guys dub her “Gidget” and make her their new mascot.

As I mentioned above, Perigard wanted the main characters of the *Gidget* movies to influence the *Psycho Beach Party* cast. Gidget and Chicklet both face taunting from the man-hunting bikini girls and the local surf bums. They are both considered under-developed and freakishly uninterested in the opposite sex. Both had a energy that moved forward and up, forever inspiring them to persevere.

Moondoggie and Star Cat both sought to leave behind a life privilege in order to pursue a simpler existence as a surf bum, subject only to the whims of the ocean and the restless soul. Both men sought to hide their feelings for Gidget/Chicklet by remaining cold and distant; too cool to be bothered by a little girl. Moondoggie and Star Cat possessed a physical and vocal swagger that showed the world just how cool each man was.

The Great Kahuna and the Great Kanaka mirrored each other physically and vocally. Kahuna used his authority to veil the fact that he was really a jobless bum, while Kanaka asserted his dominance over others to hide his desire to be dominated. Both men used physical size and a low-pitched, powerful voice to signify their authority.

### **Preshow Conclusions**

The sum of my research was expressed beautifully by a student in Janet Rodgers’ Acting and Singing with Archetypes class. After leading the students through the Archetypal journey of the Huntress, Rodgers asked the men in the class how they felt after completing the journey of a female archetype. Dallas Tolentino, a senior who played Provoloney in *Psycho Beach Party*, replied that he “didn’t think about feminine biology,



[he] focused only on the feminine spirit.” In other words, the transition between male and female is not simply a physical journey, but a personal, “spiritual” one as well. The life of a woman onstage is expressed vocally, physically, and emotionally. This integration proved to be vital to the success of our work. It required an open, cooperative relationship between Perigard, Goldstein, and me. We were able to work together in a way that provided various approaches and techniques for the actors to use without anyone undermining the others’ work. This relationship was appreciated by the entire cast, and I’m thankful for this dynamic.

## **Rehearsal Process**

### **Basic Breath and Vocal Technique with Cornell**

At VCU, vocal training for the undergraduates begins in the second year. As a sophomore, Kyle Cornell had only just begun his Stage Voice & Speech class when we began rehearsing *Psycho Beach Party*. This set Cornell back in a number ways. He had great creative instincts for Marvel Ann and her vocal and physical mannerisms, but he wasn't able to use his voice with its full efficiency and range. He was also unfamiliar with the terms Perigard and I used with regard to his vocal usage and volume on-stage. Phrases and terms such as "coining a phrase," "use the operative word," "resonance," etc. were lost on Cornell.

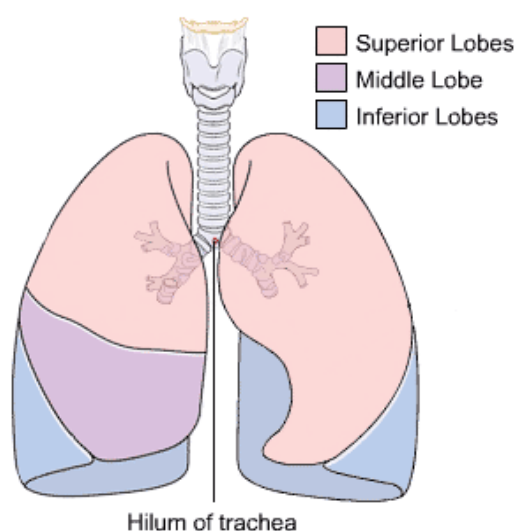
During rehearsals, I worked with Cornell on these basics; essentially, we needed to fit the first semester of Introduction to Voice into the first three weeks of rehearsal. Cornell proved a quick learner and an enthusiastic student.

We began with abdominal breathing and diaphragmatic support. To help Cornell become aware of his current breath usage, I asked him to lie on the floor with one hand on his chest near his collarbone and the other on his stomach just below his belly button. He quickly saw that he wasn't breathing efficiently or fully.

I explained to Cornell the anatomy of the lungs, then I showed him an exercise taught to me by Janet Rodgers. In this exercise, Partner A stands with his or her feet about

hip width apart, knees loose and not locked, and his or her shoulders relaxed. Partner B stands behind Partner A and places his or her hands just below Partner A's right shoulder, where his or her top right lobe of the lung is located. Partner B then asks Partner A to inhale while focusing on the image of breathing into B's hands. It is useful if Partner B presses lightly with his or her hands so that Partner A will feel a small amount of resistance in the area they are breathing into. This process is repeated with all five lobes of the lungs, moving from top to bottom on the right side, then top to bottom on the left side. When this is completed, Partner B places his or her arms around Partner A's torso at the bottom of the ribcage, encircling the floating ribs. Partner B then asks Partner A to breathe into his or her arms, feeling a light resistance as they inhale. This helps Partner A feel the sensation of breathing fully and shows him or her the potential for movement and expansion in the rib cage. Cornell and I repeated this exercise nightly at rehearsal for the first week. It helped immensely in his awareness and control of his breathing.

Figure 4: The Lobes of the Lungs



As an actor, Cornell was fidgety and unsteady on his feet. This hindered his breath support and detracted from the confidence Marvel Ann needs to possess. To help counter this, we worked a lot in Patsy Rodenburg's kabuki squat, where the individual stands with feet slightly more than hip width apart. For this position, the knees should be slightly bent; supporting the body steadily, but loose enough to allow for quick movement. The spine should be straight, and the shoulders, neck, and jaw should be relaxed. The kabuki squat is a starting position for many of the exercises that I taught to Cornell. It's a neutral position from which one can easily breathe and support one's voice.

There are a number of exercises that we use in the Stage Voice & Speech class that I taught to Cornell in order to help him develop his vocal skills. Many of these included warm-ups that exercise the articulators as well as facial and oral muscles. The first is "Hum and Chew." The actor places a large, imaginary gumball in his or her mouth and begins to chew. The larger the gumball, the wider the stretch for the mouth/jaw. While chewing the gumball, the actor begins to hum gently. The actor begins to play with pitch, moving up and down his or her range while paying close attention to any breaks that feel or sound rough. These breaks can be smoothed out by gently working through them a few times. This warm-up gets the jaw moving while warming up the actor's full range of pitch.

A second exercise that is especially effective when following "Hum and Chew" is Janet Rodgers' "Jazz Lips." To begin, review the movement of a jazz square. The left foot crosses to the right of the right foot. The right foot then steps back. Then the left foot steps to the left of the right foot (both feet are under the shoulders at this point). Then the

right foot steps in front of the left foot. The movement begins again with the left foot crossing in front of the right foot and so on. This sequence creates a square movement. Once the actor is comfortable with this sequence, he or she stretches the lips towards the right ear, as if he or she is trying to kiss that ear. Then he or she stretches the lips down to “kiss” the chin. Next, he or she “kisses” the left ear, then the nose. This sequence mirrors the movement of the feet (right, back, left, front). When the actor is comfortable with this combination, a jazzy tune can be hummed while continuing the sequence with the feet and lips (right, back, left, front). Finally, the sequence is reversed (left, back, right, front). The directionality of the lip stretch matches the movement of the feet. The focus on technical precision is second to the release found through stretching. This exercise should be more fun than technically accurate. It warms up the lips as well as the voice through gentle humming.

In a similar vein with “Jazz Lips” is the “Addams Family” which is the perfect conclusion to this warm-up trio. The Addams Family exercise was also developed by Janet Rodgers. From a kabuki squat, the actor stretches his or her tongue to the right, as if to lick his or her right ear. Then he or she stretches the tongue down to “lick” his or her chin. He or she continues the sequence to “lick” the left ear, then the nose. After practicing this sequence, the actor adds in vocalization to the tune of the Addams Family theme song, adding a hearty [ha ha], accompanied by the kabuki squat, in lieu of the customary finger snaps. The voice should remain fully supported throughout the exercise. Also, the actor should focus on stretching the tongue fully. The muscles of the tongue extend down the back of the throat, and it is helpful to keep this image in mind while

stretching the tongue. This sequence can be reversed from (right, down, left, up) to (left, down, right, up), just as in the “Jazz Lips” exercise.

We also used a mirror-image exercise to help Cornell ground himself and become steadier on his feet. This exercise was adapted from its use in Archetypes work, developed by Frankie Armstrong and inspired by Bonnie Raphael. The individual begins by standing with the feet shoulder-width apart. The back of the neck should be long, so the chin is almost parallel with the floor. The shoulders should be relaxed. The individual then imagines a mirror-image of him or herself underneath his or her feet. The bottoms of the mirror-image’s feet are touching the bottom of the individual’s feet. The individual walks around the space, sensing the extra space he or she now takes up. After coming to the neutral starting position, the individual next imagines two mirror-images, one to the right and one to the left of the individual. Again, the individual walks around the room with the mirror-images, feeling the extra space. Once again returning to the neutral starting position, the individual then imagines two more mirror-images, this time placing one behind and one in front. After moving around the space and returning to neutral as before, the individual imagines one final mirror-image, this one in the space above the individual’s head. The individual moves around the space once more, feeling all six mirror-images surrounding him or her. This exercise helps actors ground themselves and to own the space around them.

In addition to work on breath and centering, we focused on clarifying Cornell’s diction. Cornell’s articulation was weak, particularly words ending with plosives as well as ends of phrases. His articulation was even softer during intimate moments with other

actors, particularly Mitchell. There were many scenes in which Marvel Ann whispers in Star Cat's ear, or they share close, intimate conversations. Cornell's lines were almost entirely lost due to a combination of weak articulation and his feeling that he was "shouting" at Mitchell.

A helpful exercise to practice diction is the "Peking Opera," an exercise developed by Janet Rodgers that practices the consonant sounds used in most American dialects. The Peking Opera was inspired by Rodgers' observations at a VASTA workshop involving work with the Peking Opera. It combines consonant repetition with physical actions to reinforce strong articulation on the stage. The actor needs to be sure that each time the sound is repeated, the accompanying action is repeated as the consonant is sounded. The actions are linked together through a story to engage the imagination. To begin, the group stands in a large circle, making sure each actor has room to move. The exercise is as follows.

Repeat each of the sounds [p], [b], [t], and [d] four times each while marching.

Repeat [k] four times while chopping down a tree.

Repeat [g] four times while pushing the tree to knock it into the river.

Repeat [l] four times while swimming in the river.

Repeat [s] as snakes appear in the water and move around the space.

Repeat [z] as the snakes turn into bees and fly around the space.

Repeat [f] four times as the bees turn into leaves and float gently to the water.

Repeat [v] four times while the leaves float on the surface of the water.

Repeat [tʃ] when the water evaporates and the leaves are crunched underfoot.

Repeat [dʒ] when mud is stepped in and scraped off of the foot.

Repeat [ʃ] while sweeping the leaves into a pile.

Repeat [hɑ] as a leaf blower magically floats down from above.

Repeat [r] while using the pull cord to start the leaf blower.

Repeat [ɹ] while blowing the rest of the leaves into a pile.

Repeat [hɑ] while sending the leaf blower back to the sky.

Repeat [θ] while pulling a plastic bag up around the leaves.

Repeat [ð] while tying the bag shut.

Repeat the sounds [m], [n], and [ŋ] while rolling in the leaves after jumping on the pile.

The dinner bell is heard. Repeat [wʌ] four times in response while returning to standing in a circle.

Everyone gets to have what he or she likes best for dinner! Repeat [jæ] four times in response while celebrating.

Finish the celebration with an elongated [wʌ] as the circle moves to the center in a group high five.

The Peking Opera is particularly helpful as part of a pre-rehearsal warm-up routine. It brings the cast together as a group, warms up the articulators, and engages the cast's imaginations.



In addition to basic breath and vocal technique, there were specific sounds on which Cornell and I worked. The first was a “sexy growl” as a “display of animal magnetism.” After playing with various sounds, Perigard, Cornell, and I decided that an alveolar trill worked best.

One of my biggest concerns for Cornell was his screaming. In the script, Marvel Ann screams repeatedly, and I wanted to make sure Cornell was familiar with healthy screaming techniques.

To warm-up and prepare for screaming, Cornell and I would go through Janet Rodgers’ “Anaconda” exercise. It is named after its inspiration, the Anaconda roller coaster at Kings Dominion in Virginia. The basic vocal and physical movement of the exercise mirrors the up and down movement of the roller coaster. To begin with, the individual drops forward at the waist, with the knees loose, and the upper body relaxed. As the voices moves up in pitch, the upper body mimics the movement of the voice. Beginning on [hɑ] on a low pitch, the individual scoops up in pitch for a short phrase. The next phrase scoops up even higher in pitch, and so on, continuing for eight phrases. By the end of the eighth phrase, the voice has reached its upper pitches, and the body is standing upright. Then the actor mimics the downward swoops and swirls of the roller coaster on a descending scale. This process is repeated on [he], [hi], [ho], and [hu].

Following the Anaconda, Cornell and I “tossed” sounds back and forth. While standing on opposite ends of the rehearsal room, I would mime an underhand toss while voicing the sound [hɑ]. Cornell would mime catching the sound, then repeat the toss back

to me. In the exercise, the toss starts on a low pitch, and it rises in pitch with each toss until it reaches the top pitches of each partner's voice. The advantage of tossing while voicing the sound is that the motion helps support the sound while giving a physical sensation to the resonance and forward movement to the sound. When teaching this exercise in the classroom, I generally try to match my students into male-male or female-female pairs due to the general similarities in pitch range. However, in this case, it was helpful for Cornell to hear my head voice in relation to his as it encouraged him to access his falsetto range.

In addition to learning basic breath and vocal technique, Cornell also needed coaching to help him implement his newly learned techniques. We first focused on the timing of his breathing. For example, during one scene, Marvel Ann arrives at the beach only to find Star Cat flirtatiously horsing around with Chicklet. She shouts "Star Cat!" to get his attention, then provocatively marks her territory (i.e. Star Cat) through words and body language. At first, Cornell wasn't fully supporting this line, and even after his support improved, the line was lacking the inherent command it contains. I coached Cornell through a few different ways to breathe with this line. This work was inspired by a lecture on clowning, given by Dr. Aaron Anderson. He suggested to us that an inhalation is a discovery and an exhalation is the reaction to that discovery. For example, when one is startled by a mouse, one doesn't immediately exhale, then inhale while reacting. Generally, one gasps (the discovery on the inhalation), and then squeals in fright, or perhaps sighs "oh, it's only a mouse." This inspired Cornell to inhale sharply and fully as he/Marvel Ann saw Star Cat with Chicklet. The exhalation/exclamation of "Star Cat"

began to be colored by Cornell/Marvel Ann's reaction to this sight. Cornell also began planting his feet in order to ground his stance and own the space more fully before gaining Star Cat's attention.

I also coached Cornell on analyzing and scoring his script from a voice and speech perspective. We discussed operative words, and what choices an actor can make when a director asks him or her to "coin a phrase" or "punch a word," etc. We began by finding operative ideas and words. One exercise we used that works well with long lines and monologues is "Telegram." The actor paraphrases the text into a short telegram that still fully conveys the objectives and ideas of the monologue and includes any key words. For example, the Duchess of Gloucester's Act 1 Scene 2 monologue ("Why droops my lord...") to the Duke can be summed up with "Kill King. Take Crown. Rule." Once Cornell had his "telegrams" he was able to use them to find his operative words and phrases. Our coaching sessions then turned to what choices an actor can make to highlight these words and phrases. Volume, pitch, inflection, tone of voice, and rate can all be used to make a word or phrase stand out. There are various exercises we used to help Cornell utilize these choices.

### **Alba Emoting**

Alba Emoting is a system, developed by Dr. Susanna Bloch, a neuroscientist, that helps access emotions. It uses breath patterns and muscle tensions to create an emotional

response without external stimuli. Bloch refers to these patterns as “effector patterns,” and they consist of breathing, posture, and facial patterns.

On her webpage, Bloch breaks down the learning of Alba Emoting into three stages. The first stage is robotic in nature; the “technical precision” is important. The emotional responses generally seem “stereotypical, oversized,...[and] ingenuine” at this stage. The second stage is referred to as “Induction.” In this stage, the patterns begin to become personalized; they begin to vary from person to person. The emotional responses also begin to be “more genuine in appearance and experience.” The final stage, “Integration”, is reached when the actor no longer needs the pattern to produce an emotional response. At this point, the actor is in control of his or her emotional experience.

When using Alba Emoting, it is important to “step out” after the scene, rehearsal, class, etc. The stepping out process allows the actor to return to an emotional and physical place of neutrality. The stepping-out process is as follows:

1. Standing with feet shoulder width apart, the individual clasps his or her hands in front of the body.
2. As the individual inhales, he or she squeezes the hands together while bringing them up in an arc that ends behind his or her head.
3. As the individual exhales, the hands are released back down to the starting clasped position.
4. This breathing pattern/gesture is repeated two more times.

5. The individual then brushes the emotion off of his or her body, as if brushing dust off of one's clothes.
6. Finally, the individual steps backwards, effectively stepping "outside" of the emotion.

The six basic emotions analyzed by Dr. Bloch are Tenderness, Happiness, Erotic, Fear, Sadness, and Anger. The effector patterns for each are as follows:

### **Tenderness**

Breathing should be an even rhythm in and out through the nose. The body is in an open and relaxed position (some actors find it helpful to sit on the floor in a comfortable, open position). Tilt the head with a relaxed facial posture. A small smile is encouraged. Light vocalization, such as humming, is encouraged as well.

### **Happiness**

Inhalation is sharp and deep, taken in through the nose. This is followed by short, saccadic (choppy) exhalations. Maintain an open body posture with the lips spread laterally.

### **Erotic**

Breathing is an even rhythm, both inhaling and exhaling through the mouth. Some actors, as they feel a stronger engagement in the emotion, find their breathing rhythm intensifying. The body is relaxed (perhaps even lying on the floor), keeping the head back or to the side, exposing the neck. Maintain a relaxed facial posture.

### **Fear**

Breathing should be irregular and consist of shallow, quick inhalations through the mouth followed by jagged, uneven exhalations. Keep the body tense, leaning backwards, and lift the arms and hands for protection. The facial posture is tense with wide eyes and open mouth.

### **Sadness**

The inhalation is quick and saccadic through the nose, then exhale through the mouth. Relax the body and let the head hang forward. Let the eyes have a soft focus, looking down. Frowning and furrowed brows are encouraged as well.

### **Anger**

Inhale and exhale sharply through the nose. Both the body posture and facial posture should be tense. Lean forward slightly, press the lips together, with the eyes sharply focused.

Alba Emoting was an effective tool for Cornell. After explaining the theory behind Alba Emoting and the process of accessing the emotions, I taught the effector pattern for erotic love to Cornell first. My primary reason for beginning with erotic love was to help Cornell become comfortable with displaying his sensual side. As a provocative man-hunter, the character of Marvel Ann flaunts her sexuality, and Cornell needed to get comfortable with this aspect of the character. The effector pattern for erotic love also helped Cornell in his journey of self-awareness. It helped him drop his breath into his abdomen, and began to free up some movement and flexibility in his hips.

Next, Cornell and I began focusing on the effector pattern for anger. During a scene between the characters Marvel Ann and Star Cat (Cornell and Mitchell respectively),

Marvel Ann becomes increasingly angry with Star Cat. She scolds him, then yells at him before storming off. Cornell found this scene difficult. He had trouble building up to anger; instead of bringing to life Marvel Ann's rage, Perigard, Cornell, and I felt that Marvel Ann was coming across as annoyed and whiny. This is when Cornell and I began working on the anger effector pattern in earnest. We discovered that Cornell's habitual reaction to anger was more akin to a sad emotional reaction. To access his anger without sadness, I began by leading Cornell through the effector pattern for fear (one with which he was comfortable). As his emotional reaction to this pattern became more genuine, I began transitioning him into elements of the anger effector pattern without labeling them as "anger." I could see physical changes that signaled anger; fists clenched, brow furrowed, a wide stance, etc. I then asked him to speak the monologue in which Marvel Ann explodes into rage. The energy and passion that burst from Cornell startled both of us in a very satisfying way. After thoroughly stepping out, Cornell and I discussed what he had discovered. Cornell had experienced an emotional breakthrough; he had successfully broken past one of his habitual emotional defenses (reacting to anger passively rather than aggressively). This experience was helpful to Cornell in two ways. First, he learned how to incorporate the anger effector pattern into his work onstage. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, he gained a tremendous amount of confidence from the experience. It was a powerful "a-ha!" moment that reinforced his growth and progress as an artist. He began to see that he was bringing Marvel Ann to life, not merely "playing" a part.

## **Belly Dance**

The use of belly dance and hip scarves proved to be invaluable to our process. Because of the hip isolations, ribs isolations, spinal flexibility, and core strength that belly dance requires, I have used it repeatedly in teaching all levels of voice. During the rehearsal process for *Psycho Beach Party*, I taught basic belly dance moves to Cornell and Callan to aide in their core strength and flexibility. Belly dancing also proved to be a great way for Cornell to find his inner sex kitten!

I began teaching belly dancing solely to Cornell to aide his development of core awareness and strength. The moves I taught him included rib isolations, hip isolations, shimmy, and hip figure eights.

For rib isolations, the individual stands with loose but supported knees, placing the feet about hip width apart. Individuals who have trouble isolating the ribs from this position can sit cross-legged on the floor to begin. From this stance, the individual places his or her hands on the hips. Next, he or she creates an imaginary plane passing through the torso just above the belly button. Nothing below this line should move. The individual may keep the hands on the hips to serve as a reminder to keep the hips still during this move. From this position and with this image in mind, the individual slides his or her ribs to the right. I find it helpful to image a string attached to the middle rib that is slowly being pulled outward. Range of movement depends on the flexibility of the individual, so limited movement is no cause for worry for the beginner. The individual repeats this move to the back, the left, and the front, with similar string imagery. When the individual is comfortable with each direction separately, then he or she can begin to circle the ribs, perhaps imagining playing hula hoop around the ribs.



Hip isolations continue the use of the imaginary plane passing through the body just under the ribs. The individual can place his or her hands around the floating ribs to give a physical sensation to this image. A kabuki squat is the best starting position for this exercise. The more the knees are bent, the greater range of movement the individual will have. There are two types of hip movements that can be practiced in isolation. The first is an asymmetrical movement where the hips tilt upwards alternately. I like to use the image of the right hip bone coming up to meet the right shoulder, then the left hip raising up to meet the left shoulder. In this move, the hips are not on the same level plane. The second hip movement is parallel to the floor. The individual slides his or her pelvis to the right, with both hips staying even. The individual then his or her pelvis to the left, staying parallel to the floor. Both of these moves help develop awareness and control of the core muscles.

Finally, we used a figure-eight move. There are two types of figure eights. One is vertical, the second is horizontal. I will begin with the vertical. From the same starting position as the hip isolation, the right hip rises up, then moves out to the right, and finally floats down and back to center. This creates a circle to the right. While the right hip is circling, the left hip has created an opposite circle on its own. After the right hip has circled, the left hip is rises, moves out to the left, then down and back to center. By alternating hip circles, a figure eight movement is created. The vertical hip figure eights should not move along a horizontal plane. It's helpful to imagine panes of glass immediately in front of and immediately behind one's body.

The horizontal figure eight is performed with a similar pattern. Beginning from the same position, the right hip moves forward (leaving the left hip behind). The right hip is then moved out to the side, then to the back. This pattern is repeated with the left hip.

After teaching Cornell these moves, I noticed a marked improvement in his abdominal support and spinal flexibility. During rehearsal one night, Perigard mentioned that while Cornell was rapidly improving, he felt that Cornell was still missing “his inner diva.” I added an element to our belly dance lessons in order to help Cornell build the self-confidence he needed to bring out his “inner sex kitten.” We added the use of a hip scarf. This helped in two ways. The most immediately satisfying effect for Cornell was the instant feeling of sensuality that the hip scarf provided. In addition, it helped develop self-awareness of the core muscle movements. Because each movement now had an accompanying sound and physical sensation, he was able to start refining his movements. One night, as we danced, Cornell remarked “damn, I’m sexy!” At that point, I asked him to say some of his lines, particularly those during scenes with Mitchell/Star Cat. The change in his support, articulation, and presence in the moment was remarkable. That night was a turning point for Cornell’s work; I felt that was the night he ceased to be a young actor trying to “catch up” with the rest of the cast.

After seeing the success of teaching Cornell belly dance moves, I began teaching the same basic moves to Callan. Because Callan was in his second year of vocal training, and thus already familiar with abdominal support, our focus was on body language for the character of Ann Bowman. The script required Callan to transition between the personae of Chicklet and Ann Bowman repeatedly and rapidly. To aid these transitions, Goldstein

(the movement coach) and I worked with Callan on finding different energy centers for each personality. In addition, I worked with Callan to center each voice in a different resonator. Belly dancing enhanced this work because Ann Bowman's energy center was placed in her pelvis, which also doubled as the resonator for her low-pitched voice. Because Chicklet's energy center was placed at the top of her head and her resonance was in her facial mask, Ann Bowman's low energy center provided a great contrast. Callan practiced transitioning between the two characters while wearing the hip scarf because it provided a physical sensation for Ann Bowman. Belly dancing with a hip scarf also helped Callan become more comfortable with Ann Bowman's sexuality.

One final advantage of working with belly dancing was the stress relief it provided for the actors. Some nights, Callan would feel overwhelmed by the number of personalities he was playing, and Cornell would feel frustrated by the differences in amount of training between himself and the rest of the cast. Belly dancing relieved a lot of stress and frustration, and it helped bring the actors to an emotionally centered place where they could find more joy in their art.

### **Portrait Project**

Erica Tobolski's Portrait Project is one of many exercises we use at VCU to develop character voices. It works on an outside-in principle. This description is taken from Janet Rodgers' *The Complete Voice and Speech Workout*.

The exercise begins with the facilitator laying out a number of pictures. The pictures should contain pictures of people of different races, genders, locations, etc. None

of the people should be easily identifiable (i.e. no public figures). After laying out the “portraits”, the facilitator then coaches the actors with the following instructions.

1. From the paintings/photographs on the table, choose an image that is compelling to you.
2. Find an aspect of this image and re-create it with your body. It may be a posture, an expression, or an energy.
3. Begin moving about in this body, exaggerating this characteristic. Try standing, sitting, walking, etc.
4. Begin to notice the room through these eyes. What are you drawn to? Do you see textures? Light vs. dark? Are you comfortable in this space? Do you want to hide?
5. Begin to notice others in the room, but do not interact with them yet.
6. Notice what other characteristics arise in you, both physically and emotionally.
7. Find a sound that expresses what you are experiencing internally. Let the sound evolve into a word or phrase.
8. Continue exploring the room and observing others while speaking this word or phrase.
9. Let the word or phrase extend into a running inner monologue, spoken out loud to yourself. Keep connecting to physical life, postures and movement as you speak out loud.
10. What is your viewpoint to the others? What is your status?

11. Begin interacting with others in the room, leading into conversations. If you find yourself slipping out of character or back into your own physical and vocal patterns, re-connect with the first image/posture and sound you created.

This exercise can be tailored for a specific voice exploration by asking the students to choose an image that is most unlike them, or of a different gender, or their secret self. Extended improvisations, reflecting specific situations or tasks, can be suggested by the instructor (Rodgers 158).

I taught this exercise to Callan to help him develop the personalities of Tylene, Dr. Rose Mayer, and Steve. This proved to be especially helpful in the development of Dr. Rose Mayer. One of the portraits included in the group was a drawing of a middle-aged woman with chic, thick-framed glasses and a small white dog on her lap. As soon as Callan saw the picture, he exclaimed “That’s her!” From that picture, he developed a posture and a dialect for Dr. Rose Mayer. Callan soon discovered that she stood with her head slightly forward and her highly-animated hands remaining primarily in front of her chest. She also spoke in a nasally voice with a Yiddish-Brooklyn hybrid dialect.

Figure 5: Dr. Rose Mayer



This “outside-in” approach led to an interesting improvisation. While trying to develop Tylene’s voice through the portrait project, Callan expressed increasing frustration over a feeling of physical disconnect that hindered his work. Perigard had previously shared his image of Tylene as a heavy-set African-American woman. Callan, who is very slender, could not imagine, much less portray, living in a body with that much extra weight and bulk. To continue our outside-in work, I borrowed a couple of heavy backpacks and asked Callan to wear one on his back and the other on his chest. I then asked him to continue the portrait project with the physical sensation of weight and physical bulk. Callan discovered that he had to readjust his breath pattern; he got winded easily when he tried to move around while speaking. Callan decided that Tylene’s energy center lived in her hands. Because she got winded from moving around too much, most of Tylene’s body language was communicated through her hand gestures and head movements. Callan also discovered a need to support her voice so it would carry through the space in order for her to be heard without actually locomoting through the space.

### **Scene Partner Work with Aliff and Mitchell**

Cornell and Callan’s character developments were directly related to their work with Mitchell and Aliff (Star Cat and Kanaka, respectively). They worked together mostly with Perigard during regularly scheduled rehearsals, but there were a few occasions when Goldstein and I worked separately with Cornell and Mitchell.

The first thing Goldstein and I focused on with the pair was eye contact. Cornell made very little eye contact with Mitchell during their scenes, and it affected Marvel Ann’s body language negatively; it detracted from the confidence and directness that are vital to

her personality. I began by asking Mitchell and Cornell to stand a few feet apart and to simply breathe while looking at each other. I then asked them to look each other in the eye and take a breath together before looking away. This was followed by two breaths, three breaths, and so on until they grew more comfortable with the eye contact.

Breath sharing is another effective exercise that builds connection, aids eye contact, and helps actor find center and focus. This exercise is done in pairs. The partners stand a few feet apart, facing each other. Partner A inhales, and as he or she exhales, Partner B inhales. As Partner B exhales, Partner A inhales, and so on, while maintaining eye contact. This exercise helps create a connection between the actors; sharing one of life's vital functions can be incredibly intimate.

Cornell, Mitchell, and I also worked on weight sharing. Because of the trust and support this work requires, it was very effective following Breath Sharing. In this exercise, Partner A stands in a kabuki squat. The wide base creates a solid foundation; the low center of gravity allows them to support another person's weight. Partner B then leans back to back with Partner A, allowing Partner A's back to support Partner B's weight. Partner B then slides down Partner A's back, allowing gravity to do the work. This should be a slow slide; Partner A is a slow motion waterfall gliding down the cliff of Partner B's back. Partner A glides all the way down to the floor. The partners then switch positions. The supporting partner should always remain in a kabuki squat, but the sliding partner can change positions; sliding side against side, back against chest, etc. This exercise worked well for Cornell and Mitchell because it was a safe, supportive way to practice physical

closeness. It gave them a chance to get used to being physically close without immediately adding in the sexual element required for their characters.

Another exercise we used with the entire cast as well as separately with Cornell and Mitchell was “Treasure Hunt.” This exercise is done in partners. There is buried treasure under the floor, and Partner A knows where it is. Partner A sits on the floor in that spot to protect the treasure. Partner B must find a vocal and physical way to move Partner A so that Partner B can sit on the spot to claim the treasure. Both Partners must be aware of safety during this exercise. The instructor should remind the actors of the following directions: do not strain or push the voice, do not push on the other partner’s head or neck, sustained pushing or light pulling movements are best (no quick, direct movements such as punching, etc. should be used). When Partner B successfully claims the treasure spot, Partner A begins to try and remove Partner B from the spot so as to reclaim the treasure. This exercise, first and foremost, is a wonderful way for actors to practice abdominal support for the voice during highly physical moments. It’s also a chance for them to practice a variety of sounds, engaging the body while keeping the throat released to avoiding straining the vocal folds. In addition, it helps build connection between the actors. Especially for student actors, the rehearsal process can become stressful, so this is a chance for them to practice necessary skills while enjoying a sense of play and joy. Finally, it engages the imagination through the image of a treasure hunt. Actors are welcome to imagine any sort of treasure buried under the ground—the more specific and detailed the image, the better!



## Reflection and Application

As with any experience in life, it is possible to look back and ask “what if?”

Throughout my work with Perigard, Goldstein, and the *Psycho Beach Party* cast, I made a lot of decisions involving the processes and techniques that I would introduce to the actors. One of these decisions involved the use of Janet Rodgers’ and Frankie Armstrong’s Archetype work. It involves the use of fourteen Archetypal journeys that reflect the universalities of the human race. These archetypes include the Spiritual and Temporal Leader, the Trickster, Lucifer/the Devil, the Huntress, the Child, the Maiden, the Lover, the Mother, the Crone, the Noble Warrior, Sybil/the Prophetess, the Blind Seer, the Initiator/Gatekeeper, and the Hero’s Journey. These journeys put actors in touch with the universal elements that are a part of us all. These journeys allow the actor to discover new vocal, physical, and emotional possibilities within themselves.

Ideally, I would have led Callan and Cornell through certain archetypal journeys in order to open new vocal possibilities for each of them. Olisa Enrico has created a “five-in-one” journey that takes the actor through the journeys of the Child, Maiden, Lover, Mother, Crone (arguably, the female life-cycle). That journey would have been ideal for both Callan and Cornell. In addition, I would have chosen to lead both actors through Lucifer’s journey and the Huntress’ journey. The female life-cycle would have been ideal to help them connect to the feminine spirit by creating a bond that is shared through

common experience. Lucifer's journey would have helped them to find the inner craving for control that Marvel Ann and Ann Bowman share. I also would have chosen the Huntress' journey because of the feminine power that it holds. The Huntress is a strong woman whose mantra is "I am a woman unto myself." She would have been an ideal role model for Chicklet at the end of the play, when she accepts herself for who she is and finds a balance between all of her fractured personalities.

## Conclusion

Working with the cast and crew of *Psycho Beach Party* was a fulfilling and empowering experience. I had wonderful inspirations and resources to guide my preparation, an enthusiastic cast, and an inspired flow of ideas that passed seamlessly between the director, assistant director, the cast, and myself. The people one works with truly make the difference, and this experience would not have been the same without everyone involved.

The different resources I used in preparing to work on *Psycho Beach Party* differed somewhat in tactic and technique, but each had the same goal in mind: the well-being and success of the actor. This focus on the individual journey inspired me to focus on finding the connection between each actor and his personal feminine side in addition to finding each actor's connection with the character. This approach proved to be successful, as measured by the personal fulfillment felt by Callan and Cornell and by the reaction and perception of the audiences during each performance. Callan and Cornell felt a great deal of pride concerning their process and performance. They both reported that they felt personal growth during the process, and both were pleased with the final result. As I mentioned earlier, many audience members believed that Callan and Cornell were female actors playing female roles. They were praised for their successful transformation into character; even their close friends told them, "I had no idea that was you!"

Words cannot express how committed and enthusiastic the *Psycho Beach Party* cast was, or how fulfilling and inspiring it was to work with them. Even when tired or not feeling well, each cast member arrived at rehearsal with a smile, ready to work. They tried new ideas vocally, physically, and emotionally. They played with the text like a kitten plays with a ball of yarn; they tossed it around and took it apart to find all the small threads it's comprised of. They encouraged one another, supported one another, and inspired one another. This had a huge impact on my work as vocal coach. Because of this connection and affection, I was able to work with Callan, Mitchell, Aliff, and Cornell in pairs and small groups. They developed their characters together; their vocal and physical mannerisms developing in reaction to each other. During the performances, the audience enjoyed the benefits of this relationship by seeing a truly ensemble cast that had discovered and succeeded together.

Finally, working with Perigard and Goldstein made the rehearsal process infinitely more enjoyable and more deeply layered for the cast and for me. Goldstein and I would often work together in small coaching sessions with the Callan, Cornell, Mitchell, and Aliff. We were able to transition between ideas seamlessly. If I led the actors through an exercise, Goldstein would find an inspiration to build upon the original exercise and vice versa. We handed control back and forth without care for power or ego. Perigard appreciated what Goldstein and me were able to offer to the cast, and he was very vocal in his appreciation, both to Goldstein and I, and to the cast. This created an supportive, safe atmosphere that made it easier for the actors to work fearlessly.

Working with the *Psycho Beach Party* cast and crew taught me much more than simply ways to vocally transition between male and female. This process taught me to work with individuals; to identify their needs, listen to their concerns, and build upon their strengths. I learned that research and preparation is vital, but that sometimes, we need to follow our instincts in the moment and let inspiration guide our feet. Finally, I learned that the people we work with truly make or break an experience. When we keep ego, power, and fear out of the equation we can share together and in a search for truth, we find art.

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## VITA

Megan Persinger was born in 1984 in Hiawatha, KS. She received her Bachelor of General Science (BGS) at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. While living in Lawrence, she taught at Topeka Civic Theatre and Academy and Hilltop Child Development Center. She also worked at CLIMB Theatre in South St. Paul, Minnesota as an Actor-Educator.

Currently residing in Richmond, Virginia, she is finishing her MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University. While at VCU, she has served as voice and dialect coach for many shows, including *Dracula*, *Cabaret*, *Glass Menagerie*, and *Psycho Beach Party*. In the fall of 2009, she presented the workshop “An Active Approach to the International Phonetic Alphabet” at the Voice and Speech Trainers’ Association (VASTA) conference.